

# H A U S DER KUNST



**EXHIBITION: ARCHIVES IN RESIDENCE:  
SOUTHEAST ASIA PERFORMANCE COLLECTION  
28.06 – 29.09.19**

**SYMPOSIUM: PATHWAYS OF PERFORMATIVITY  
IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART  
27 – 28.06.19**

**EN**

# Introduction

## Archives in Residence

“Shouldn’t we each time, each joyful and contemplative time when we open a book, consider the miracle that this text has even found its way to us?” So wrote the art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman in his 2007 essay ‘The Archive Burns’. Didi-Huberman’s reflection compels us to question the manner in which information is recognized and safeguarded over time, so that it may be used as a historiographic source; a question that underpins the exhibition series “Archives in Residence” at the Archive Gallery of Haus der Kunst.

The Archive Gallery was conceived in 2014 as a space for thought and reflection. It introduced a new exhibition format which set out to inject open-ended dynamics into the otherwise static connotation of the term “archive”; thereby serving as a springboard for new ideas and artistic projects. Situated in an exhibition room freely accessible from the building’s central Middle Hall, the Archive Gallery stands as a visual marker of both the turbulent history and the complex processes through which Haus der Kunst was formed, and which continue to affect its present.

In its current state, the Archive Gallery hosts a changing programme of exhibitions in co-operation with national and international institutions, as well as with artists and researchers; it has hosted numerous exhibitions exploring different aspects of the institution’s own history, curated using Haus der Kunst’s own archival holdings. Now, the new series “Archives in Residence” (launched in 2018) places autonomous archives in the foreground focusing on the relationship between archives, the formation of history, and its representation. Responding to the oft-quoted notion of the

archive as the “memory of a society”, the series “Archives in Residence” asks the question, whose societies and histories are reflected via an archive’s strategies and structures? At the very heart of this series is the understanding that it is precisely due to the fact that archives are not just repositories or collective storehouses of testimonies of the past, that they also function as instruments of a power which, as Michel Foucault observed, “passes through its subjects”.

As opposed to publicly-accessible archives, autonomous archives often receive limited attention and exposition. The individual collectors of such independent archives decide for themselves what is worth preserving, irrespective criteria such as visibility, material value, and legal guidelines. In this way, such archives constitute places for alternative knowledge-production and generate perspectives that may not have been conceivable at the time of collecting. They preserve biographies, events and information and, in so doing, are able to generate interventions and moments of emancipation.

From the 1990s onwards, archives and archival methods have been critiqued by both artists and curators, with the question of how to exhibit an archive being at the forefront of artistic and curatorial thinking. How does one make visible something that usually eludes its visibility by virtue of the fact that its contents are often hidden in cabinets and boxes; only partially accessible or sometimes not even located onsite? The exhibition of autonomous archives therefore also leads to experimenting with the impulse to read them as temporary public places where ideas, networks, notions of authorship and the ‘unarchivable’ are thrown into the spotlight.

The 2018/19 exhibition of the “AAP Archive Artist Publications” of the Munich-based publisher, artist and art educator, Hubert Kretschmer, was the first “Archive in Residence”. Commencing in June 2019, the “Southeast Asia Performance Collection” – a digital archive and international research project, which was initiated between 2015 and 2017 by the London-based curatorial collective Something Human with the help of an expansive team of researchers – is the second project to take up residence in the Archive Gallery. For enabling this contribution to the series, we would like to especially thank the archive’s initiator, Annie Jael Kwan (curator and director of Something Human), and all contributors to the Southeast Asia Performance Collection, without whose efforts, support and expertise this exhibition would not have been possible.

Sabine Brantl  
Curator Archive, Haus der Kunst

## Building the Southeast Asia Performance Collection

Between 2013 and 2015 Something Human (under the co-directorship of Annie Jael Kwan) curated a series of live art programmes across London that brought together Southeast Asian and UK/European artists to explore connections between practices and contexts of making. Following this, Something Human organised for the artists to visit the Study Room at the Live Art Development Agency in East London. When they browsed the Study Room, they realised that there was very little material concerning performative practices from Southeast Asia. This observation led to the creation of the Southeast Asia Performance Collection. Building on previous short research trips in 2013 and 2014, Kwan undertook a four-month long research residency with Java Arts in Cambodia, researching the conditions for performance via extensive interviews with artists, curators and researchers in Phnom Penh, Battambang and Siem Reap, while also requesting donations of materials in order to build the collection.

The process of collecting gained momentum over the next two years when Kwan also acquired materials from artists working in performance art in Hanoi, Hue and Saigon, as well as the extensive digital archive of the pioneering Singaporean performance artist, Lee Wen. In 2017, Something Human's M.A.P (Movement x Archive x Performance) project further enabled the consolidating and indexing of these archival materials, as well as the commissioning of Batubalani Art Projects to undertake additional research and gathering of materials from the Philippines. The Southeast Asia Performance Collection (SAPC) was launched as part of the M.A.P symposium at the Live Art Development Agency in November 2017, where it has resided as an open-access archive of

digital materials representing over 50 artists from Cambodia, Vietnam, Singapore and the Philippines.

While the SAPC has sought to raise visibility of Southeast Asian artistic practices in both London and the UK, the SAPC's process has been idiosyncratic, in part due to its independent budgetary limitations, and also because it was based on a network of introductions, generosity and trust. The collection thus represents artists working in relation to Southeast Asia, as well as the interpersonal network of friendships that characterise the particular emergent contemporary art scenes. As most of the artists represented in the archive are still in the process of making work, the SAPC is also a living archive, cognisant of its incompleteness and contingency, and resistant towards any problematic intention of creating a canon. The SAPC thereby insists upon the idea of an archive as an act of 'futuring' – as a call to those interested in Southeast Asia to continue the research and gathering.

In addition to the artists featured in this exhibition and performance programme at Haus der Kunst – Anida Yoeu Ali, Ho Rui An, Le Brothers, Amy Lee Sanford, NewWorld Disorder, Tuan Mami, Judy Sibayan, Nicholas Tee, Lee Wen, Tith Kanitha, Svay Sareth and Noel Ed De Leon – other artists, collectives and festivals in the SAPC include: Leang Seckon, Boedi Widjaja, Richard Streitmatter-Tran, Khvay Samnang, Kelvin Atmadibrata, The Appendix Group, Nerisa Guevara, Roberto Chabet, Tupada Action Media Art (TAMA), Yuan MorO Ocampo, Future of Imagination 2, 3, 8, and 10, Amanda Heng, Ray Langenbach, Loo Zi Han, Lynn Lu, Bo Rithy and others.

The Southeast Asia Performance Collection at the Live Art Development Agency was initiated by Something Human in collaboration with Batubalani Art Projects, Java Arts, Independent Archive Singapore, and made possible with the support of Arts Council England, Artists International Development Fund (British Council/ACE), and the National Arts Council Singapore.

With thanks to Alessandra Cianetti (Something Human co-director 2014–2017), Dia Projects, New Space Arts Foundation, Nha San Collective, Phare Selpak Ponleu, Sa Sa Art Projects, Sangker Battambang, Six Space and Studio Revolt.

# Activating the Southeast Asia Performance Collection

Eva Bentcheva, Annie Jael Kwan  
and Damian Lentini



Svay Sareth, *Mon Boulet*, 2011  
Durational performance, 5 days  
Siem Reap to Phnom Penh, Cambodia

As the subject of this archive exhibition, the Southeast Asia Performance Collection (SAPC) is especially noteworthy for both the volume of materials which it contains – with 27 000 serial and individual ‘performance documentations’, it is the largest digital collection of performance-based practices in the context of the visual arts from Southeast Asia in Europe to-date – as well as the insights which can be gleaned from the ‘archival labour’ informing its compilation. While the initial impetus behind the collection came from a desire to interject non-hierarchical narratives into the nascent knowledge of Southeast Asian performance practices within Europe, the *process* of collecting lies at the core of the SAPC’s significance. On the one hand, the SAPC reflects the itinerant nature of performance concepts and practices across Southeast Asia, on the other, it speaks to new modes of archive-building in an age where remotely-activated networks and digital exchanges have trumped more traditional ideas of what comprises an ‘archive’ based on material objects and their provenances.

Rather than taking an art historical approach to ‘mapping’ performance art, its originators and contributors activated their numerous networks, acquaintances and institutions in order to gather materials. This process of gathering not only reflects the centrality of collaboration and camaraderie which have facilitate exchanges in contemporary art across Southeast Asia, but also highlights the importance of the online realm. The SAPC is a compendium conceived and made to exist in a digital capacity, often with inputs from multiple contributors who are geographically dispersed, and whose continued existence relies on the activation of networks.

This exhibition of the SAPC in Munich was the result of conversations between the collection’s co-founder, curator Annie Jael Kwan, and art historian and curator, Eva Bentcheva, on ways to deepen knowledge of Southeast Asian performance art in Europe. In collaboration with curator Damian Lentini, these discussions were extended to think about how platforms such as Haus der Kunst’s series ‘Archives in Residence’ could serve as a prism for ‘activating’ the SAPC, thus allowing for it, in the words of Arjun Appadurai, to become a “diasporic archive”; a collection that records the process of gathering of traces and, in doing so, leaves space for the construction of tentative identities and multiple truths.

In this manner, the three thematic threads around which the exhibition is framed – “Aesthetics and Politics of ‘Publicness’”, “Contesting and Constructing Identities” and “Archival (Re)Activations” – constitute a wider reflection on the dynamic processes and potential hurdles which govern a digital archive of performance art. With all of the videos, sound recordings and photographs included, the exhibition acknowledges the somewhat ad hoc and lo-fi nature in which many of these performances were documented. Furthermore, rather than being isolated elements within the context of an art exhibition, each thematic thread functions as an ongoing, curated conversation between the artists’ own understandings of documentation, and more general notions of performance as a medium, curatorial strategy and historic practice.

In keeping with the digital nature of the archive, the presentation emphasizes video documentation and, to a lesser extent, digital photography and sound



Amy Lee Sanford, *Full Circle*, 2012 performance, Meta House, Phnom Penh

recordings. It exhibits nine key works by the artists Amy Lee Sanford (Cambodia/USA), Le Brothers (Vietnam), Svay Sareth (Cambodia), the collective New World Disorder (Philippines), Tuan Mami (Vietnam), Tith Kanitha (Cambodia), Judy Freya Sibayan (Philippines), Nicholas Tee (Singapore/UK) and Lee Wen (Singapore), alongside site-specific performance iterations by Anida Yoeu Ali (Cambodia/USA), Noel Ed De Leon (Philippines/UK) and Ho Rui An (Singapore). The display ascribes two works per theme, and is supplemented by a larger projection of Lee Wen's *Journey of a Yellow Man #13* (1999), Svay Sareth's *Mon Boulet* (2011) and Tith Kanitha's *Heavy Sand* (2012) which simultaneously speak to each thematic grouping, as well as their interconnections and synchronicities.

### Aesthetics and Politics of 'Publicness'

Driven by either a paucity of institutional opportunities, or a wholesale rejection of the separation between art and everyday life, the performances within this thematic section demonstrate the diverse methodologies deployed by artists from both Cambodia and Vietnam in order to engage with the complexi-

ties of identity, culture and everyday exchange. Whether the static or peripatetic, each of the performances displayed here are characterized by the multivalent nature in which both past and present actions and events continue to demarcate and define the ways in which public space is understood and traversed across the region. Thus an action as seemingly absurd as Svay Sareth dragging a giant 80-kilogram silver sphere from his hometown of Siem Reap to the capital Phnom Penh transforms into a wider study into the kindness and generosity of strangers (upon whom he relied upon for food), irrespective of their individual histories. Conversely, Amy Lee Sanford's similarly trivial gesture of first breaking, then painstakingly recreating of pots in the courtyard of a temple in Siem Reap, slowly transforms into an occasion through which the complex psychological effects of war, guilt, loss, alienation and displacement in her native Cambodia can be explored.

Also probing the notion of the destruction and recreation of histories and sites is Le Ngoc Thanh and Le Duc Hai's (a.k.a. the Le Brothers) performance



Le Brothers, *Cay Cau I (The Bridge: Part 1)*, 2010 Hué, Vietnam



Racquel de Loyola, *Mebuyan: Inexhaustible Sustenance*, 2006, performance, 7a\*11d Festival of Performance Art, X-space, Toronto  
Photo: David Kemp

*Cay Cau I (The Bridge: Part 1)* along and through the spaces of the He Lum Bridge in central Vietnamese town of Hué. Spanning the expanse of the Perfume River – which was at once the very real border between North and South Vietnam, as well as the setting for one of the bloodiest battles of the war (Hué would later serve as a metaphor for the entire conflict when it featured as the backdrop for the second half of the film *Full Metal Jacket* in 1987) – the Le Brothers' poignant performance on this newly-recreated bridge questions and dissects the post-war consciousness of North and South Vietnam, and the manner in which it is played out across site, space and imagination.

### Contestations and Constructions of Identity

Not only was the concept of modern nationhood birthed relatively recently post-World War II, amidst the Cold War aftermath and its postcolonial legacies, the Southeast Asian region would also see decades of international, regional and civil conflict, including colonial and imperial violence by the British, Dutch and the USA, change of dictatorship regimes, the Vietnam War and Khmer Rouge. The works in this thematic section offer artistic methodologies to confront the anxieties of ruptured identities and family histories, offering assertions of individual artistic agency that agitate against repressive regimes and government administration. In this respect, the practices of the performance collective New World Disorder from the late 1990s and early 2000s explored how 'identity' was strategically activated in



Tuan Mami, *22398 steps - 35 hours - 45 square meters - 35 Chinese ink litres*, 2010  
Performance, Organhaus Art Space, Chongqing

the wake of the post-dictatorial Philippine nation state.

In *Mebuyan: Inexhaustible Sustenance* (2004), Racquel de Loyola references the ancient and mythological deity *Mebuyan*—the multi-breasted goddess of nurturing of the Bagobo and Manobo ethnic groups in the Philippines—in order to explore how the notion of womanhood has been temporally reformulated—and refuted—across traditional and animistic systems of belief, Catholicism, and postcolonial capitalist culture. Similarly, in wake of the fast-paced urban development following Vietnam’s *Đổi Mới* economic reforms of 1986, Tuan Mami’s *22398 steps - 35 hours - 45 square meters - 35 Chinese ink litres* (2010) seeks footing in the face of a rapidly changing society. Here, the artist dipped his feet into black ink and tracked a meditative pathway around the gallery as a way of reflecting upon the ubiquity of tradi-

tional Chinese culture in calligraphic practice; gesturing towards the dominance of Chinese influence on cultural and linguistic foundation of Vietnam, and the overwhelming recent influx of Chinese investment.

Operating with performance as a means to voice intergenerational chasms, Tith Kanitha’s *Heavy Sand* (2012) addresses the divide between younger Cambodians looking to confront globalization and capitalist development and older generations who continue to struggle with past memories. Pouring buckets of water upon her body while perched on a ladder, Tith’s performance is a critical interrogation with references to ancient Hindu-Buddhist and animistic rituals, and an indictment of rapid urban development undertaken in the city that destroyed natural eco-systems and communities. Inadvertently stirring strong response as a result of the artist’s exposure of her body (in opposition of traditional Cambodian values), the aftermath of the work reflects the central role of

viewership in reading the notion of ‘identity’ into performance art.

### Archival (Re)Enactments

The notion of archival ‘reactivation’ in performance has also long manifested in works from Southeast Asia. The work of Philippines-born artist Judy Freya Sibayan has, since the 1970s, responded to the way in which performance art continually interlocutes with art theory and discourse. In an exercise of self-citation, or (re)enacting her own intertextual production, Sibayan’s *I am (You, We are) a Rhizome* (2015) is a performative reading of an excerpt from the artist’s semi-autobiographical publication *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)* (2014). Locating her performance practice as part of a personal ‘archive’ based across texts and memory, Sibayan’s reading also speaks to the rhizomatic nature of performance art practices. Evoking the spread of ideas via the building of new roots and connections, Sibayan’s reading—played here to the background of images of her earlier performances—evokes the passages of performance practices across Southeast Asia.

Conversely, Singaporean artist Lee Wen’s (1957–2019) seminal performance of *Journey of a Yellow Man* emerged from his experience as a student in the UK, where he experienced racism against his Chinese ethnicity. Covering himself with yellow paint, Lee undertook journeys through gallery spaces and public spaces in the UK and beyond. Similarly, and with the aim to disrupt the institutional space and the narrative of British art history, young Singaporean artist Nicholas Tee staged a performance that consciously pays tribute to Lee Wen’s work. While also studying in the UK, Tee drew upon the SAPC as a resource towards his staging of

*Yellow Peril* (2019) within the exhibition *Speech Acts: Reflection-Imagination-Repetition* at the Manchester Art Gallery—that sought to focus on the contribution of diaspora artists to British art—Tee applied to his face yellow paint and gold leaf behind a magnifying Fresnel, while a tape recording of Lee Wen’s musical track of ‘Missing You’ played in the background. Taking place the days after the passing of Lee Wen, Tee’s covering of his face both paid homage to the former artist’s seminal gesture, as well as pointed to the rise of the Chinese economy and the contemporary influx of Chinese students in UK universities.



Lee Wen, *Journey of a Yellow Man*, 2001  
Pengshan, China

The exhibition is curated by Eva Bentcheva, Annie Jael Kwan and Damian Lentini, in close consultation with Sabine Brantl.



Nicholas Tee, *Yellow Peril*, 2019  
live performance, documentation courtesy of the  
Manchester Art Gallery, University of Manchester,  
the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies on British Art,  
Something Human and University of Arts London



Tith Kanitha, *Heavy Sand*, 2012  
Performance at Sa Sa Bassac,  
Phnom Penh. Photo: Anders Jiras

## Symposium: Pathways of Performativity in Contemporary Southeast Asian Art 27—28.06.19

The international symposium *Pathways of Performativity in Contemporary Southeast Asian Art* casts a spotlight on the fascinating histories of performance practices which speak to the postcolonial, Cold War and politico-economic forces that have shaped Southeast Asia after the Second World War. It brings together renowned scholars and curators from the disciplines of art history, film and theatre studies, whose work explores the central role of performance in bridging the visual arts, theatre, dance, music and political activism in the region from the 1960s to the present.

The conference aims to deepen historical awareness of the long-standing performance-based practices in Southeast Asia, while opening up dialogues around diasporic and migrant entanglements. It explores the relationship between intermediality and historical developments, especially performative practices that have been impacted by advances in technology. This discussion takes on more urgent resonances as it is framed in relation to the notions of 'identity' and 'activism' within the region in light of an increasing policing of the public media platforms. Projecting these discussions into the future, the conference concludes by exploring the intersection of performance and archiving, questioning the possibilities yielded through historicisation and research.

The symposium is generously supported by the Goethe-Institut. It is organised by Dr. Eva Bentcheva (Goethe-Institut Postdoctoral Fellow at Haus der Kunst), in consultation with Annie Jael Kwan (independent curator and founding director of Something Human).

**27.06.19**  
**2.30—4 pm**

**PANEL 1:  
AESTHETICS AND POLITICS  
OF 'PUBLICNESS'**

In the context of Southeast Asian contemporary art, public enactments have often been read as extensions of rituals or acts of political protest. Looking beyond these readings, this panel engages the notion of 'publicness' as a temporal, social and political construct. Informed by examples of performative actions staged in Cambodia, Myanmar and the Philippines from the 1990s to the present, it questions how 'publicness' may be understood via the lens of performance—in particular through its traversal of live actions, photography, dance and protest. How may the artistic-public domain be thought of as a space of uncertainty and contingency made visible via performance practices? Moreover, how does art which relies on specific sites also speak to the recent histories of toppled authoritarian regimes and rapid modernization affecting these countries?

*Performance as Picture: Performativity and Photography in Cambodia*  
Pamela Corey

*No Intersection: Where Theatre, Protest and Performance Art in Myanmar Meet,*  
Nathalie Johnston

*Wagering Performativity among Sites and Selves: Two Cases of Fraught Critical Gestures in Philippine Institutions,*  
Eileen Legaspi Ramirez

Moderator: Damian Lentini

**27.06.19**  
**4—5.30 pm**

**PANEL 2:  
EXPANDING INTERMEDIAL  
HISTORIES**

This panel reflects upon the historical motivations which have driven artists to take up intermedial approaches to art-making by deploying action along with installation, painting, sculpture, video and photography. Rather than tackling this as a purely formal development, the panel traces how artists have embraced intermediality in the Philippines and Indonesia from the 1970s until the 1990s, often responding strategically to state-back cultural programmes and growing sentiments of postcolonialism and cultural revival. Casting a spotlight on the subtle and experimental forms of intermediality which have arisen in the interstices, the panel questions how we—with historical hindsight—may now situate these practices within the boundaries perception and production in cultural production in Indonesia and the Philippines.

*Performing Epistemic Disobediences in Manila and Southeast Asia?*  
*Decolonial Possibilities in José Maceda's Udlot-udlot and Ugnayan*  
meLê Yamomo

*Pathways of Performance and Performance Art in Indonesia — 'When was performance, performance art in Indonesia?'*  
Thomas Berghuis

*Unpacking Indonesian 'Performance Art' as Transdisciplinary Collaborations in the 1980s and 1990s*  
Amanda Rath

Moderator: May Adadol-Ingawanij

**28.06.19**  
**2—3.30 pm**

**PANEL 3:  
CONSTRUCTING AND CONTESTING  
IDENTITIES**

The notion of identity has been one of the most prevalent and pervasive topics to be discussed via the lens of performance. Contrary to the belief that the presence of the body in performance art may be read as a marker of identity, this panel delves into the ways in which performance-based practices have enabled iterations of 'identity' as an unsettled state, often in fluctuation and continual negotiation. Informed by examples practices dealing with the revival of Chinese-Indonesian identity in Indonesia's post New Order era, as well as art engaging with the themes of religious and diasporic minority communities from Indonesia and Cambodia, the panel probes into the parameters of possibilities of performance. In what ways is a performative expression of remembrance possible? How may action in the context of visual art serve to express the boundaries between the personal and collective forms of self-representation?

*Things Happen When We Remember: Memory and the Archive in FX Harsono's Works*  
Wulan Dirgantoro

*Rebuilding Space, Body and Self: Alienation and Appropriation in Marintan Sirait's Performative Practice*  
Sally Oey

*Uncharted Distance: Performing In-Between Here and There*  
Anida Yoeu Ali

Moderator: Annie Jael Kwan

**28.06.19**  
**4—5.30 pm**

**PANEL 4:  
ARCHIVING  
PERFORMATIVITY**

In light of a recent surge of interest in, and support for, institutional and private archives across Southeast Asia—particularly those engaged with histories of performance and performativity—the roles of institutional politics and networks has often surged to the forefront of discussions. Returning to the ontological relationship between performance and archiving, this panel poses the question—what new relationships, themes and histories are to be gleaned in the process of transition from performance, to documentation and finally to an archive? What forms may the archive take in order to account for—and reflect—not only a work's documentation, but also performative evocations, iterations and narrations? Conversely, in what ways may performance illuminate, and perhaps even reconfigure, an archive, thus highlighting how its structures reflect the relationship and hierarchies between the state, communities and individuals?

*Form and Process*  
Chuong-Đài Võ

*Performativity Without Performance? Reflections and Questions on Medium in Post-Conceptual Contemporary Art*  
Roger Nelson

*Performance Lecture: Conspiracy of Files*  
Ho Rui An

Moderator: Eva Bentcheva

## Keynote & Lectures

27.06.19  
7—8.30 pm

**KEYNOTE**  
**SEDIMENTED ACTS: SOUTHEAST ASIAN ARTISTS' ENGAGEMENTS WITH HISTORY THROUGH PERFORMANCE**  
**NORA A. TAYLOR**

In her book *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, Rebecca Schneider wrote, in reference to time based works, that “history is a set of sedimented acts which are not the historical acts themselves but the act of securing any incident backward.” The word sediment conjures a substance that has fallen to the bottom of a river bed, a once moving source that has now been kept still. In studying performance art, one must suspend temporality and simultaneously consider the act itself and its afterlife, its past and its present through photographs or images. This talk will examine time based works by artists from Vietnam, Myanmar and Singapore and consider both their historical moment and their future by looking at their current existence as a fragment, a relic, a document or a memory. Performance art practices in Southeast Asia offer a view onto the processes of historicization that is, how works of art come to be remembered in spite of the hostile environments, in the aftermath of war and political turmoil, that gave birth to them. These are not gestures of nostalgia, but rather meta-narratives that challenge the temporalities of contemporary art.

Respondents: Mechtild Widrich and  
Chuong-Đài Võ

28.06.19  
10.15 am—8.30 pm

**KEYNOTE**  
**ANIMISTIC MEDIUM: GENEALOGY OF PERFORMATIVITY AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONTEMPORARY ART**  
**MAY ADADOL-INGAWANIJ**

Thinking ontologically in film, media and art entails thinking with an emblematic scene, figure, or myth of origin. In the intellectual history of western film theory, for instance, such established figures have included the cave, the disembodied gaze in the dark, and the spectators fleeing the screen. If we were to experiment with this kind of thinking by setting forth from Southeast Asia, what would be those exemplary scenes, figures, and myths with which to ask questions of ontology? How might we proceed from a practice, a history, a fragment, a genealogy of medium or aesthetic practice located somewhere in or across Southeast Asia, in order to ask foundational questions in art, film and media theory such as: What is image? How are images and objects animate? How do expressive forms address and enunciate? This talk takes up the scene of animistic offering rituals as that emblematic scene with which to theorise the question of performativity of address and enunciation. I will explore the question of artistic address and enunciation in Southeast Asian contemporary art in constellation with this emblematic scene of human-nonhuman communication: itinerant film projection rituals performed as an offering addressed to powerful nonhuman presence in and around Thailand during the Cold War. The talk approaches ritualistic practices and repertoires of making offerings to spirits and powerful nonhuman beings as a site

for thinking the potentiality of an expressive and performative praxis whereby powerless and precarious humans make utterances and gestures entwining bodily, material, installative, and technological practices and tools, as enunciations addressing powerful nonhuman forces and beings. Approaching the moving image practices of such artists as Korakrit Arunanondchai (*No History in a Room Filled with People with Funny Names 5*), Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook (*An Artist Is Trying to Return to 'Being a Writer'*), Ho Tzu Nyen (*The Critical Dictionary of Southeast Asia*), Lav Diaz (*A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery*), Anocha Suwichakornpong (*By the Time it Gets Dark*), and Apichatpong Weerasethakul (*Fireworks (Archives)*) in proximity with animistic projection rituals opens up generative ways of thinking about the obliqueness and idiosyncrasies of touch, illumination, scale, duration, and utterance that make these artists' handling of questions of social violence, historical destruction, and collective experiences of dislocation so strikingly challenging to description and interpretation. The talk identifies the following tendencies among this group of artistic practices: preoccupation with unknowability, form as germination and life, and intensity of scalar shifts and sensations playing on the limit of human perceptual capacity.

Respondent: Roger Nelson

# Biographies

## **Anida Yoeu Ali**

is an artist whose works span performance, installation, video, images, public encounters, and political agitation. She is a first generation Muslim Khmer woman born in Cambodia and raised in Chicago. She is a founding collaborative partner of Studio Revolt, an independent artist-run media lab in Phnom Penh. Her multidisciplinary work, *The Buddhist Bug*, has been exhibited in Phnom Penh galleries, Singapore International Photography Festival, Malaysia Heritage Centre Singapore, Southeast Asia ArtsFest London, and at the 5th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale.

## **Dr. Eva Bentcheva**

is the Goethe-Institut Postdoctoral Fellow at Haus der Kunst. She completed her PhD in art history at SOAS, University of London, where she was also a Senior Teaching Fellow on Diaspora Contexts and Visual Culture. Her research and curatorial work focus on performance and conceptual art from South and Southeast Asia and their diasporas. She was formerly Visiting Research Fellow and Adjunct Researcher for the Tate Research Centre: Asia.

## **Dr. Thomas J. Berghuis**

is an independent curator and art historian based in the Netherlands. Berghuis was recently appointed the position of City Curator of Leiden by the Lucas van Leyden Fund in the Netherlands. He is the author of *Performance Art in China* (2006), and has recently been researching performance art in Indonesia, 1970s-present.

## **Dr. Pamela Nguyen Corey**

is lecturer in South East Asian Art at SOAS University of London. She is currently completing her book manuscript *The City in Time: Contemporary Art and Urban Form in Vietnam and Cambodia*, and co-editing

a special issue of *Oxford Art Journal* on voice as form, scheduled to appear in 2020.

## **Dr. Wulan Dirgantoro**

is a McKenzie Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. Her research interests are gender and feminism, and trauma and memory in Indonesian modern and contemporary art. Her publications include *Feminisms and Indonesian Contemporary Art: Defining Experiences* (2017).

## **Prof. Patrick D. Flores**

is Professor of Art Studies at the Department of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines and Curator of the Vargas Museum in Manila. He was one of the curators of *Under Construction: New Dimensions in Asian Art in 2000* and the Gwangju Biennale (Position Papers) in 2008. He co-edited the Southeast Asian issue with Joan Kee for *Third Text* (2011). He curated an exhibition of contemporary art from Southeast Asia and Southeast Europe titled *South by Southeast* and the Philippine Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 2015. He is the Artistic Director of Singapore Biennale 2019.

## **Dr. May Adadol Ingawanij**

is Reader in Visual Culture at the University of Westminster where she co-directs the Centre for Research and Education in Arts and Media (CREAM). She is writing a book titled *Contemporary Art and Animistic Cinematic Medium in Southeast Asia*, with support from a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship (2018–19). Recent curatorial projects include *Animistic Apparatus* (ongoing), *Lav Diaz Journeys* (London, 2017), *On Attachments and Unknowns* (Phnom Penh, 2017) and *Comparing Experimental Cinemas* (Bangalore, 2014).

### **Nathalie Johnston**

is the founder and director of Myanm/art, an exhibition space and resource centre supporting emerging Myanmar artists in Yangon and abroad.

### **Annie Jael Kwan**

is an independent curator whose self-initiated research residency supported by the Artists International Development Fund (British Council/Arts Council England) and National Arts Council Singapore led to the initial gathering of performance art materials from Cambodia and Vietnam. With her curatorial initiative, *Something Human*, she has delivered exhibitions and live art in the UK and internationally to explore movement across borders, including the 2017 M.A.P. (Movement x Archive x Performance) project at the Diaspora Pavilion in Venice; and the launch of the pioneering Southeast Asia Performance Collection at the Live Art Development Agency in London. As a founding core member of the research network Asia-Art-Activism (in residence at Raven Row till November 2020) her work investigates the contemporary practices of Southeast Asia/Asia. She is the recipient of Live Art UK's Diverse Actions Leadership Award.

### **Dr. Damian Lentini**

is a curator at Haus der Kunst, Munich. After receiving his doctorate at the University of Melbourne (2009), he relocated to Germany in 2014. He has worked on projects with El Anatsui, Sarah Sze, Harun Farocki, Raqs Media Collective, and Forensic Architecture, among others. In 2018, he curated Khvay Samang's *Popil* for Haus der Kunst's *Capsule* exhibition series.

### **Noel Ed De Leon**

is a visual and performance artist whose interests span archiving as artistic practice, installation art made with readymade and found objects, and multi-media sculpture. His work explores the themes of memory, remembrance and mapping traces of history through material objects. He has presented works at the London Biennale, at the A-Side B-Side Gallery, London, the Juan Miro Foundation, the Live Art Development Agency, Framer Framed, and is currently developing a solo exhibition at the Jorge B. Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Centre in Manila.

### **Dr. Roger Nelson**

is an art historian, and curator at National Gallery Singapore. He completed a Postdoctoral Fellowship at Nanyang Technological University, and holds a PhD from the University of Melbourne, on modern and contemporary "Cambodian Arts." He is co-founding co-editor of the journal, *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*.

### **Sally Oey**

studied art history, intercultural communication and psychology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University and Leiden University. As a PhD candidate at LMU, her research interest lies in contemporary artistic practices from Indonesia that deploy performative strategies and relate to questions of otherness. Her research is supported by doctoral scholarships from the German Academic Exchange Service and the Bavarian Equality Grant.

### **Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez**

is a writer/researcher and critic who teaches at the University of the Philippines (UP) Department of Art Studies. Moving forward with degrees

in Journalism and Art History from UP, she is currently doing long-term research on site-specific community art initiatives across the Philippines, and is particularly interested in questions relating to affect, efficacy, and agency.

### **Dr. Amanda Katherine Rath**

is a lecturer of modern and contemporary art of Southeast Asia in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies and the Institute of Art History at the Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

### **Ho Rui An**

is an artist and writer working in the intersections of contemporary art, cinema, performance and theory. Working primarily across the mediums of lecture, essay and film, he probes into the ways by which images are produced, circulate and disappear within contexts of globalism and governance. In 2018, he was a fellow of the DAAD Berliner Künstlerprogramm.

### **Prof. Nora A. Taylor**

is the Alsdorf Professor of South and Southeast Asian art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is the author of *Painters in Hanoi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art* (Hawaii 2004 and NUS Press 2009) and co-editor of *Modern and Contemporary Art: An Anthology* (Cornell SEAP 2012) as well as numerous articles and two edited volumes on modern and contemporary Vietnamese and Southeast Asian art. She co-edited an upcoming special issue of *Art Journal* on History as Figure in the work of Contemporary South and Southeast Asian artists.

### **Dr. Chương-Đài Võ**

is a Researcher at Asia Art Archive, specializing in modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia. Her writing

can be found in *Afterall Journal*, *Revue culturelle* (forthcoming), *Southern Constellations: The Poetics of the Non-Aligned*, Taipei Fine Arts Museum's *Modern Quarterly*, and *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*.

### **Dr. Mechtild Widrich**

researches at the intersection of performance and the built environment. She has published on re-performance, feminist Actionism, monuments, as well as Singapore's recent museum landscape, which is part of a broader study on site specificity and national identity. She teaches at the Art Institute of Chicago and is a board member of Art Journal.

### **Dr. meLê Yamomo**

is Assistant Professor of Theatre and Sound Studies (University of Amsterdam), the author of *Sounding Modernities* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), and laureate of the »Veni Innovation Grant« (2017–2021) for his project »Sonic Entanglements«. He is also a scholar-in-residence at the Interweaving Performance Center and artist-in-residence at Theater Ballhaus Naunynstrasse-Berlin.

## Talks and Performances



Anida Yoeu Ali. *The Buddhist Bug Project: Spiral Cyclo*. 2013  
Phnom Penh, Photo: Studio Revolt

27.06.19  
6–7pm

**PERFORMANCE:**  
**THE BUDDHIST BUG PROJECT**  
**ANIDA YOEU ALI**

Anida Yoeu Ali's *The Buddhist Bug* series (2009–present) is presented in different forms – video, photography, installation and live performance – all of which are stand-alone works and together form a continued artistic investigation. The central piece is an elongated saffron-orange tubular structure with regularly interspersed circular hoops, that is activated during a performance with Ali wearing an orange sweatshirt and with the hood pulled forward to resemble a *hijab*, and its legs performed by an assistant whose upper half is hidden within the voluminous coils.

Ali is first generation Cambodian-born, and of mixed Khmer and Cham-Muslim heritage. She left with her family for the United States as refugees in 1979 in the wake of the Khmer Rouge genocide. The Bug was first realized during Ali's her graduate studies at the School of the Art Institute Chicago in 2009, and she continued to develop the work when she moved from the US to Phnom Penh on a Fulbright scholarship in 2011. The Bug has since been shown internationally in museums and exhibitions. In Cambodia, Ali staged the Bug across different environments, from the urban landscapes of Phnom Penh, along the river, temple sites and paddy fields, and even expanding to 40 meters as an installation in Siem Reap as well as in Phnom Penh.

These excursions across Cambodian landscapes and within its communities express the artist's urge - similar to others of the diasporic generation of

conflict and cultural rupture - to re-discover and reconnect with her past. While the work attracts attention with its striking, playful appearance, the Bug is understood as an "other," whose very presence confronts the common with the unfamiliar, and embodies within its displaced being the paradoxical fantasies of anxiety and fascination.

28.06.19  
5–5.30 pm

**PERFORMANCE LECTURE**  
**CONSPIRACY OF FILES**  
**HO RUI AN**

Could the moment of the opening of an archive also be one of its foreclosure? In *Conspiracy of Files*, a peculiar historical episode in Singapore, the so-called Marxist conspiracy of 1987, becomes a point of departure for an investigation into the relationship between state power, the archive and the files that comprise it. In this close viewing, what is examined is less the files themselves than the act of filing: a performative gesture that lends power to the invocation, "it's in the files".



Ho Rui An, *Tripping, Troping*, 2018  
Performance lecture at 'UnAuthorised Medium',  
Framer Framed, Amsterdam, Photo: Marlise Steeman

04.07.19  
6—7 pm

**PERFORMANCE**  
**FEAST OF THE PREDATOR**  
**NOEL ED DE LEON**

*Feast of the Predator* is a new durational performance by Philippines-born artist Noel Ed De Leon which explores notions of power, confrontation and ceremony. Over the past decade, De Leon has developed a powerful performance practice, framed by his passion for collecting antique and historical objects from Britain and the Philippines. In his works, these objects are interwoven into conceptually-rich performances which speak to the histories of conflict and confluence intertwining Europe and Southeast Asia.

For *Feast of the Predator*, a site-specific work developed in response to the Southeast Asia Performance Collection, De Leon takes up the material of fur in order to foster a conversation between the locality of Haus der Kunst in Munich and the artist's hometown of Bautista in the province of Pangasinan in the Philippines. Historically, fur has played a key role symbolizing both power and affluence, as well as ethnic and religious belonging. Yet, underlying these social and cultural uses, fur also symbolizes predatory instincts, concerns for animal rights, loss of biodiversity and ecological destruction, which echo strongly in the present predicament of the Philippines. This live performance combines sound and installation-making in order to explore the role of attire and camouflage in constructions of nation-building and decolonization in the Philippines.



Lawrence Carlos, *Kilapsaw: The Delirium Sequence (80 mins)*, double exposure photograph, 2016  
Documentation of the performance 'Kilapsaw: Everything Must Go', 2016, by Noel Ed De Leon,  
Kulay Labitigan, Lawrence Carlos, London, 2016

04.07.19  
7—8 pm

**LECTURE**  
**TO DEMYSTIFY, PLAY, MANIFEST, AND**  
**TAKE A STEP TOGETHER:**  
**ANNOTATIONS ON THE PERFORMATIVE**  
**ENCOUNTER IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**  
**PATRICK D. FLORES**

This talk initiates a conversation on tendencies that generate a condition in which a performative encounter takes place between artists and their audience in Southeast Asia, particularly in the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Such an encounter partly expresses a desire to recover the encounter from the interests of an artworld that is perceived to be governed by an exclusionary bureaucracy. Thus, the performative gesture contributes to release art into a larger lifeworld through critique, spontaneity, self-initiation, and collective action. In working through inhibitions, the exhibition as a project, which includes the festival and the biennale, ramifies through the liveliness of the performative.

27—28.06.19

**SYMPOSIUM: PATHWAYS OF**  
**PERFORMATIVITY IN CONTEMPORARY**  
**SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART**

27.06.19, 6—8pm  
Exhibition opening: *Archives in Residence: Southeast Asia Performance Collection*, curated by Eva Bentcheva, Annie Jael Kwan and Damian Lentini, in close consultation with Sabine Brantl. With live performance, Anida Yoeu Ali, *The Buddhist Bug* (6—7 pm)

Keynote lecture: Nora Taylor, "Sedimented Acts: Southeast Asian Artists' Engagements with History Through Performance" (7—8 pm)

04.07.19  
Performance: Noel Ed De Leon, *Feast of the Predator* (6—7 pm)  
Lecture: Patrick Flores, "To Demystify, Play, Manifest, and Take a Step Together: Annotations on the Performative Encounter in Southeast Asia" (7—8 pm)

The symposium is generously supported by the Goethe-Institut, and is organised by Eva Bentcheva (Goethe-Institut Postdoctoral Fellow at Haus der Kunst), in consultation with Annie Jael Kwan (independent curator and founding director of Something Human). The live performance programme is additionally made possible through the support of "Gastspiele in Deutschland" of the Theatre and Dance Department of the Goethe-Institut.

# Exhibitions 2019/20

## **Miriam Cahn: I as Human**

12.07–27.10.19

## **At Night**

### **Sammlung Goetz in Haus der Kunst**

12.07.19–12.01.20

## **Kuratorische Einführung von Archives in Residence: Southeast Asia Performance Collection**

24.07.19

## **Markus Lüpertz: The Zone of Painting**

13.09.19–26.01.20

## **DER ÖFFENTLICHKEIT– von den Freunden Haus der Kunst Theaster Gates: Black Image Corporation**

25.10.19–03.05.20

## **Interiorities Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Leonor Antunes, Henrike Naumann, Adriana Varejão**

29.11.19–29.03.20

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